DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 045 RC 009 825

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TITLE The Rural Experimental Schools Program: Some Implications for Federal Reformers.
PUB DATE 7 Apr 77
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, New York, April 7, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Budgets; Change Strategies; Communication (Thought Transfer); Educational Innovation; *Experimental Schools; *Federal Programs; Formative Evaluation; *Interagency Cooperation; Personnel; Planning; Problems; *Program Descriptions; *Program Evaluation; *Rural Areas; Specifications

ABSTRACT

The National Institute of Education's (NIE) Experimental Schools (ES) program is described in terms of development and evaluation in this report on the ES rural component. Specifically, this report details the following: (1) Objectives and Procedures (competition requirements involving school districts of 2,500 or less in population, a local plan, comprehensive change, a five-year terminal Federal funding commitment, and participation in a research endeavor); (2) Relationship of ES/Washington to Local School Districts (the selection period of March 15-June 30, 1972; the planning period of July 1, 1972-June 30, 1973; production of an acceptable formal project plan as specified by Federal guidelines and interpreted by the Federal Project Officer; critical re-examination of assumptions in the initial "letters of interest" submitted by the 10 chosen districts; prior approval by ES/Washington of budget and staff; an interactive process of plan review and revision; a commitment to comprehensive change; formative evaluation of project process; contracting for plan implementation; and the implementation period of July 1, 1973-June 30, 1976); (3) Implications and Recommendations (short-term feedback sessions involving both local and Federal officials; a vehicle to create a broker role between Federal and local officials; and a problem oriented manual on Federal-local relationships). (JC)

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# THE RURAL EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOLS PROGRAM: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR FEDERAL REFORMERS*

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The Experimental Schools program arose during a period of "pause and reflection" early in the Nixon presidency when basic assumptions about federal involvement in local education were being re-examined. Out of the reflection came a concern that the federal role during the 1960s had been too directive and too fragmented, leading to a variety of local assistance programs that lacked overall coherence at the federal level and provided insufficient opportunity for initiative at the local level. The lack of overall coherence was thought to have fostered a piecemeal change strategy and an emphasis upon the development of new educational products (curricula, techniques, and machines) inappropriate for widespread utilization at the local level (Budding, 1972). The conclusion emerging from these concerns was that a new change strategy was needed, one that would give greater autonomy to local school officials to plan and implement innovations which they thought would best address local needs.

The Experimental Schools (ES) program became a major vehicle for testing the efficacy of one new strategy (National Institute of Education, 1974). It was first announced publicly in President Nixon's budget message to the Congress in January 1969, and was further explicated in his Message on Educational Reform and Renewal of March 1970, as a strategy for building "a bridge between educational research and actual practice." It was to represent a new approach for federal change efforts, involving local school districts and the federal government as "partners" in a

RC009825

*A paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, N.Y., April 7, 1977.

cooperative effort of "field experiments" in comprehensive educational change. The reform message also proposed the creation of a new National Institute of Education (NIE). The Experimental Schools program was seen by many of its proponents as a prototype of research initiative which NIE would carry on.

Originally funded through the U.S. Office of Education (OE) and later transferred to the National Institute of Education (NIE), the Experimental Schools program became operational in December 1970 with an anticipated budget of $190 million to be expended over a period of eight fiscal years.[1] Approximately 75 percent of the program's expenditures were to be devoted to the support of educational change at the local level--the remainder was to go to the evaluation and documentation of the local change efforts. The knowledge gained from systematically studying the linkage of federal aid and local initiatives was to be widely disseminated so that future federal and local efforts could benefit from the ES experience (Budding, 1972).

During the period from January 1971 through June 1972, the Experimental Schools program held three separate competitions and selected eighteen projects--eight urban and ten rural--for substantial long-term funding. Each project has been intensively studied by a research organization under contract to the National Institute of Education.[2] Since July 1972 I have been directing the studies of the rural school districts, and it is with respect to this portion of the Experimental Schools program that this paper is concerned.

## OBJECTIVES AND PROCEDURES OF THE RURAL ES PROGRAM

The inauguration of the rural portion of the Experimental Schools program was made known through an "Announcement of a Competition for Small Rural Schools," sent by the U.S. Office of Education to all school districts in the U.S. having fewer than 2,500 pupils. (Henceforth, this document will be referred to as the "Announcement.")

The Announcement emphasized four special features of the program. To be eligible for funding, the school districts would have to indicate a willingness to:

- design their projects locally, but within some general federal guidelines;
- seek to bring about changes which affected all schools and subject matter areas in the district and hence were "comprehensive" in scope;
- assume the continuation costs of the project after the federal funds had been phased out in five years; and
- be intensively studied over the five years of their project.

I would like to consider each of these four basic features of the "ES idea" in some detail.

A Local Plan

This program was not to be another instance of a federal agency persuading school districts to accept a federally endorsed innovation to solve local problems. Rather, it was committed to the proposition that local problems must be solved with local initiative and can be solved by capitalizing on the unique strengths of each community:

> ...the problem is not that the rural schools are small, but that small schools have not been encouraged and supported to seek quality and improvement in ways specifically appropriate to smallness (Announcement, p.1).

In stressing locally generated plans, the program's designers hoped to encourage participation and commitment of the community and to avoid half-hearted support so often found when change is perceived locally as having been initiated from the outside.

The stress on local initiative resulted in the creation of a series of distinct projects--each specific to the circumstances of the district for which it was planned. But local initiative was, in part, precisely the source of many of the difficulties which these districts faced during the initial year of their projects. In general, because of their limited experience with "comprehensive" change, these districts did not have sufficient expertise to put together the complex project envisioned by the staff of the Experimental Schools programs. In attempting to overcome this problem, many of the districts developed tense, if not strained, relations with the federal government.

Comprehensive Change

A "comprehensive" (rather than piecemeal) approach to educational improvement was stipulated in the Announcement. The purpose of this requirement was to:

> ...find out whether new educational programs which address all parts of an educational system simultaneously will be more effective than past reform efforts which have focused on only one or several parts of an educational system at a time (Announcement, p.1).

The definition of comprehensive change proposed by the Experimental Schools program included:

- a fresh approach to the nature and substance of the total curriculum in light of local needs and goals;

- reorganization and training of staff to meet particular project goals;
- innovative use of time, space, and facilities;
- active community involvement in developing, operating, and evaluating the proposed project;
- an administrative and organizational structure which supports the project and which takes into account local strengths and needs (Announcement, p.2).

Although all of the above had to considered in each rural ES project, the requirement was not necessarily intended to totally replace everything being done with something new; it did mean that:

> ...what is going on in each of these areas should be related to, consistent with and supportive of all of the other areas (Announcement, p.2).

Those school districts interested in planning and implementing a project of this extent were requested to submit a Letter of Interest to the U.S. Office of Education. Of the more than 7,000 eligible rural school districts, 316 responded.

Five Year Terminal Funding

The amount of funding to be provided for a period of five years appears to have been a powerful incentive to attract school districts to enter the competition:

> No fixed amount of money is projected for each small rural Experimental Schools site; each project will be awarded supplemental funds based on its unique needs. It is anticipated, however, that no Experimental Schools grant will exceed 15% of the annual operating costs of the system(s) involved (Announcement, p.4).

The funds were authorized only to help the districts transform their educational programs. They could not be employed to subsidize activities previously underway or to pay for routine capital improvements and operating costs. At the end of the five-year period, each district was expected to be doing markedly different things educationally, but at either the same

per-pupil costs that existed prior to the advent of its Experimental Schools project, or at an increased level which could be realistically borne by the school district itself. After June 1977, each district would assume all continuation costs.

In order to facilitate such long-range planning on the part of participating school districts, the Experimental Schools program intended to make long-term commitments to each district:

> The intent was...to provide a measure of security to the districts from the usual annual refunding cycle. It was felt that reducing the refunding uncertainties...would enable districts to make greater commitments to the changes they were proposing (Rose, 1976).

Since there was no authority for making five-year commitments to school districts that would be "legally binding" on the federal government, officials of the Experimental Schools program intended to make commitments that would be "morally binding." Although local school officials were continually skeptical of the ability of the ES program to honor its long-term commitment, the funding pattern which emerged (a one-year planning grant along with a three-year contract for project implementation, followed by a one-year extension for the transition from federal to local funding) clearly represented a major advance over the series of one-year awards typical of the federal government at that time.

Participation in a Research Endeavor

The Announcement also attached great importance to the need for the "documentation and evaluation" of the ES program.

> The Experimental Schools program, through this competition, is making available the opportunity for a limited number of rural school systems to test new ideas for educational improvement which are developed in and for a small, rural school setting. Since the number of projects that can be funded is limited, and since what can be learned from them may be valuable for many small school districts, it is important to have these efforts thoroughly documented and evaluated (p. 1).

To achieve this objective, each school district was expected to design and implement "formative evaluation" procedures which could collect data about project effectiveness to be used by project decision makers.

In addition, the Experimental Schools program held a competition to select an independent organization to conduct educational research on the rural portion of the Experimental Schools program. In June 1972 Abt Associates Inc., an applied social science research firm in Cambridge, Mass., was awarded a long-term contract to design and implement an educational research project sensitive to the multiple objectives of the Experimental Schools program. The research approach of Abt Associates called for the study of these school districts through a combination of full-time participant observation within each district, periodic testing of students, and a series of interviews and other forms of questioning of students, administrators, and other community residents. Three major research reports have been issued to date (Fitzsimmons, Wolff and Freedman, 1975; Corwin, 1977; Herriott and Gross, 1977). Thirteen others are scheduled for issuance upon completion of the research in December 1978.

## RELATIONSHIP OF ES/WASHINGTON TO LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

In the spring of 1972, each of the ten small rural school districts began a five-year relationship with the Experimental Schools program in Washington, D.C. (ES/Washington), which can be viewed in terms of three time periods: selection, planning, and implementation.

### The Selection Period (March 15 - June 30, 1972)

For most of these school districts, the initial contact with ES/Washington began with the receipt of the Announcement in late March 1972. The Announcement called for the submission of a fifteen-page "Letter of Interest" by April 15th.

In the Letter of Interest, ES/Washington was seeking information about the readiness of the school districts to undertake a process of planned comprehensive change. It was also acknowledging that small rural school districts were not likely to have the ability to write formal proposals on short notice.

> The intent of first requiring letters of interest and then paying for the development of a plan was to increase the equity of the competition and reduce the costs to those who were not selected (Rose, 1976).

The Letter was to address a series of topics. Of particular interest to ES/Washington were the responses of the applicant districts to the following instructions:

- Describe your current educational program stating present educational purpose and goals, the nature of the curriculum and the present organization to accomplish stated purpose and goals.
- List and describe what you feel to be the most important strengths and resources available to your school district which would be most helpful in developing an improved educational program. Please rank them in order of importance.
- List and describe briefly what you feel to be the most significant weaknesses of your current educational program, ranking them in importance.
- Describe how you would change and improve your educational program, utilizing the strengths and resources you have identified in attempting to overcome your weaknesses (Announcement, p. 7).

The Letters of Interest prepared by each of the ten selected districts provide considerable insight into their readiness for change. Each Letter addressed the topics listed above, yet each was unique in style and flavor. All letters sounded a common tone of frustration with the quality of education which these school districts were able to offer. In broadest terms, their problem was a series of interrelated "lacks"--lack of money, lack of trained personnel, lack of variety, lack of alternatives. Most of the

school districts looked upon their human resources--people in the community and in the administration, the teachers and pupils--as their greatest strengths. Their common theme for change was clearly one of individualizing instruction and making it more responsive to pupil needs.

In many respects, the strengths of the school districts were also reported to be their weaknesses. Although the students, teachers, staff, and community were seen as resources, the same groups were also frequently identified as needing to be motivated, retrained, and more involved. The rural character of the districts was as often referred to as a strength (providing closeness to nature and to other people and an opportunity for wholesome activities) as it was called a weakness (resulting in isolation, stagnation, low funding, and a low self-image). The change to which the districts committed themselves by applying for funding was welcomed and aggressively looked for; at the same time, their Letters emphasized the importance of their traditional values, close family relationships, and stable populations.

The Letters of Interest were written hurriedly, no doubt because of the four-week deadline for their submission. They were also written for an explicit purpose--to respond to the perceived prioities of ES/Washington in order to obtain badly needed additional funding.

The Letters of Interest prepared by the applicant school districts were subjected to a complex, multi-stage review by the Experimental Schools program. Each letter was read and rated by at least two ES/Washington staff members. In addition, five external panels, each consisting of approximately ten members, were convened on a regional basis to review and rate overlapping samples of the Letters. From the resulting ratings, twenty-five "finalists" were selected and their Letters subjected to further review and rating by a committee of thirteen consultants who assembled

for two days in Washington, D.C. Based upon the committee's recommendation, three-member teams visited thirteen applicant school districts to obtain first-hand knowledge considered helpful in the site selection process.

Two groups of school districts were eventually selected for participation in the small schools project. Six districts were eventually awarded one-year grants in order to plan a five-year project of comprehensive educational change, with a federal "moral commitment" that they would subsequently be funded for four additional years. Their planning grants included funds to begin project implementation on a pilot basis. Six other districts received one-year planning grants, but with the understanding that long-term funding would be conditional upon the results of their planning process. They were not awarded any funds for pilot implementation. Three of the five school districts presented in this volume (Jackson County, Arcadia, and Shiloh County) originally received long-term commitments; two (River District and Butte-Angels Camp) received only the one-year planning grants. All five were funded for the full five-year time period.

The Planning Period (July 1, 1972 - June 30, 1973)

At the time the planning grants were accepted, the administrators of the ten rural ES school districts were not aware of the active role which ES/Washington staff members would play during the planning period of these projects. Within the National Institute of Education, the substantial grants to those school districts for the planning year and the virtual promise of large multi-year funding seemed to suggest that the federal government must exercise a responsibility to insure successful launching of the projects. Over time, ES/Washington developed a concern that its survival as a federal program depended upon the ability of these school

districts to produce plans which would reflect well upon its capabilities. Given the limited planning expertise which existed in most of these districts at the time they were awarded their planning grants (and the increasing vulnerability of ES/Washington within NIE), ES/Washington gradually became the "senior partner" in the local planning process.

The expectations of ES/Washington for the performance of these school districts during the planning period were communicated to them in several ways:

- a formal Grant Document was prepared by the contracts office of the U.S. Office of Education in June 1972 and subsequently accepted by the Board of Education within each ES district. The document made explicit the number of dollars available to the district during the planning year and discussed more generally the purposes for which those dollars could be spent.
- Appended to the Grant Document was a set of Guidelines for the preparation of a Formal Project Plan.
- A federal monitor (hereafter referred to as the ES/Washington project officer) was assigned to oversee the grant relationship between the federal government and each ES school district. Monitoring took a variety of forms and occurred through visits of school district staff members to Washington, D.C., periodic telephone calls, and letters and memoranda.

Although what was communicated by various ES/Washington staff members to their counterparts in the ES districts frequently varied, eight types of general expectations were applied to all small rural districts:

Production of an Acceptable Formal Project Plan. In order to remain eligible for long-term funding, each school district was expected to

produce by June 1973 a Formal Project Plan acceptable to the federal government. According to the Grant Document, the plan was to be no more than 100 pages in length. Although organized in a manner specified by the Guidelines, it was to be a local statement of comprehensive goals for the school district and of the procedures and resources necessary for the accomplishment of those goals over a four-year period. After the Formal Project Plan was judged acceptable, ES/Washington intended to contract with each school district for the implementation of the proposed changes spelled out in its plan.

Critical Re-examination of Assumptions in Letters of Interest. In the preparation of their Formal Project Plans, the districts were encouraged not to feel locked into assumptions or proposals made in their Letters of Interest. During site visits to at least six of the ten school districts (made in August 1972), an ES/Washington project officer informed school district administrators of ES/Washington's awareness that a certain amount of "grantmanship" (telling the "feds" what one believes they want to hear) went into many of the Letters of Interest. It was acknowledged that this was understandable behavior, necessary at the time to compete successfully for selection. The project officer emphasized that "the competition is over." The job now faced by these districts was to "think boldly about a brighter future for your community and its school system." The emphasis was upon starting the planning process "from scratch, if necessary," to produce a Formal Project Plan which "both you and the federal government can live with for four years" and an educational program which "the citizens of your community will want to continue on their own after the federal funds have been phased out."[3] Although most districts were initially taken aback by such candor, all welcomed the autonomy it seemed to imply.

Broad Participation of Affected Groups. There was a strong expectation on the part of ES/Washington (stated in the Announcement, reiterated in the Grant Document and Guidelines, and emphasized in telephone calls, correspondence and site visits) that in identifying possible project goals (and in selecting among them), the leaders of the planning process must obtain broad participation from teachers, students, parents, and other citizens. In the course of their monitoring during the planning year, ES/Washington project officers generally encouraged the formation of formal advisory bodies with representatives from each of these groups. In no district, however, did such a body function actively during the entire life of its project.

Prior Approval by ES/Washington of Budget and Staff. ES/Washington was required by federal funding regulations to exercise scrutiny over expenditures and staff appointments. The Grant Document specified that all professional staff being considered for major roles in the project be "acceptable to the federal government" and that all anticipated expenditures for equipment of over $200 receive prior approval. Although ES/Washington staff members considered such scrutiny to be a "routine requirement" for any funding relationship between the federal government and local school districts, its intensity was a novel experience for these small rural school districts and became a source of considerable tension between several of them and the federal government.

An Iterative Process of Plan Review and Revision. ES/Washington staff members generally viewed themselves as partners with local officials in an iterative project planning process (Rose, 1976). The major product of this partnership was expected to be the Formal Project Plan called for by the Grant Document. The Guidelines specified the submission of a preliminary draft by December 15, 1972, and a final version by April 15, 1973.

Although a similar process had been employed previously by the Experimental Schools program in connection with its urban projects, none of these small rural school districts was prepared for the extended process of review and revision which necessitated in some cases as many as four drafts and continued well beyond the intended deadline. In the course of these deliberations, the respective rights and responsibilities of the federal government and of the various school districts often became a major issue. Quite frequently, federal officials questioned the willingness of local officials to engage in systematic planning, and local officials questioned the federal government's willingness to permit them to design and implement their own projects (Corwin, 1977).

A Commitment to Comprehensive Change. The Announcement, the Grant Document, and the Guidelines all made explicit the expectation of ES/Washington that each of the school districts would produce a plan for comprehensive educational change.

Although ES/Washington did not prepare a detailed written explication of the concept of comprehensiveness beyond that presented in the Announcement, its staff members generally led the rural ES school districts to understand that to be "comprehensive" a project must:

- involve all public schools within a community,
- involve the total student population at all twelve grade levels of the public schools of a community,
- involve all subject matter areas available to children attending the public schools of the community,
- involve a concern for: (1) curriculum; (2) staff development; (3) community involvement; (4) organization, administration, and governance; and (5) use of time, space, and facilities, and
- be organized around a "central theme."

Perhaps no aspect of the original design of the Experimental Schools program proved as difficult for these small rural school districts to implement as that of "comprehensive" change.

Formative Evaluation of Project Progress. The Formal Project Plan of each of the ES school districts was expected to include a component concerned with the formative evaluation of project progress. ES/Washington expected that this component would, over time, help decision making within the ES school districts become systematic, with judgements about the success of the other project components being made on the basis of "relevant data" objectively interpreted and fed back into the operational decision making of the project. The planning and implementation of the formative evaluation component, however, proved to be particularly difficult for all ten small rural school districts.

Contracting for Plan Implementation. While the funds for the planning year had been awarded as grants to the school districts, ES/Washington was required by NIE to contract with the school districts for the implementation of the Formal Project Plans. The budget levels were to be negotiated between the NIE contracts office and the local ES project leaders. As in any contract, both parties would bind themselves to "perform": ES/Washinton to pay out funds at agreed levels and at agreed times, and the school districts to produce comprehensive educational change that had been locally planned and described in detail in the Formal Project Plans.

In June 1973, ES/Washington offered contracts to all six of the school districts which had been given long-term "moral commitments" the previous June and to four of the six districts which had been given conditional commitments. The two districts which were not offered contracts had been judged by ES/Washington staff members and their consultants as unsuccessful in preparing a Formal Project Plan conforming to the expectations of the

Experimental Schools program.

The Implementation Period (July 1, 1973 - June 30, 1976)

Although six of these ten school districts had been encouraged to begin pilot implementation activities during the planning year and although some formal planning continued in all districts after the signing of the contracts with NIE, the three-year period from July 1, 1973, through June 30, 1976 was expected to be devoted primarily to implementation of the plans developed during the initial year. It was to be followed by a one or two-year period phasing out all ES funding.

ES/Washington's expectations for the implementation period were communicated principally through the negotiation and subsequent signing of the contracts. Discussions of long-term funding began in January 1973 with the review of drafts of Formal Project Plans submitted during the planning period; for most of the school districts, talks continued well into the summer of 1973. The typical contract document was approximately ten pages long. The formal expectations of ES/Washington were spelled out through a series of sixteen "special provisions," the most important of which incorporated the Formal Project Plan of each school district into a "scope of work" statement calling for the implementation of that plan.

## SOME TENTATIVE IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE RURAL ES EXPERIENCE

The designers of the ES program felt that there was much that could be learned about the planning and implementing of educational change from a careful longitudinal study of the experiences of the ten rural districts through December 1977. Under a contract to the National Institute of Education, Abt Associates Inc. is currently preparing book-length qualitative

case studies of the experiences of each of the ten districts and quantitative cross-site studies of pupil, organizational, and community change. These final reports are scheduled for completion in 1978.

In order to make available some preliminary findings and implications Abt Associates recently produced chapter-length case studies of the experiences of five of the rural school districts during the period between March 1972 (when they received the ES Announcement) and July 1976. (Clinton, 1977; Donnelly, 1977; Firestone, 1977; Messerschmidt, 1977; Wacaster, 1977). Each of the case-study narratives was subjected to analysis and interpretation by five students of the educational change process (Gideonse, 1977; Kent, 1977; Kirst; 1977; Lippitt, 1977; Saario, 1977). Neal Gross collaborated with me in the overall planning and implementation of this endeavor and in its presentation as a book for use in the training of educational leaders (Herriott and Gross, 1977). The following tentative findings, implications, and recommendations for future federal initiatives are drawn from our synthesis of both case-study narratives and their analysis as presented in that book (Gross and Herriott, 1977).

Survey Findings and Implications for Future Federal Initiatives

In contrast to many federal agencies, ES/Washington required its program officers to be centrally involved in the change efforts of the local school districts. Some provided technical assistance to local school officials; others attempted to offer general advice, and still others largely restricted their activities to dealing primarily with contractual matters. A few adopted a "mixed" definition of their role (Corwin, 1977).

The extensive involvement of federal officials in the five local change efforts provided a unique opportunity to examine problems that arise in federally-stimulated educational change efforts and steps that might be taken to minimize them. If, as educational officials generally believe, the federal government will continue to play a significant role in the funding of public schools, then both parties have an important stake in minimizing these problems.

As Corwin (1977) notes, government officials who monitor the progress and quality of performance financed by federal agencies are "...in a position to exercise a vital influence on the nature and quality of relationships that federal agencies establish with local communities (p.1)." The frequency and intensity of the interactions between local officials and ES/Washington varied considerably during different phases of the five projects,[4] yet throughout the change efforts local officials in each of the school districts were frequently at a loss to account for the pronouncements or decisions of ES/Washington or the actions of its local representatives. Furthermore, local educators were at times greatly concerned and perplexed by what they viewed as the efforts of Washington bureaucrats to "take over" their school systems. Local school administrators blamed many of their serious problems on the needless constraints imposed by ES/Washington, on difficulties in communicating and working with its officials. One problem that especially vexed them concerned how they should interpret the term "comprehensive educational change" in managing their projects. The "locals" claimed that ES/Washington never responded to their requests to specify the basic requirements of a "comprehensive" project. The ambiguities about this matter and the uncertainties it created, as Kent (1977) has noted

created serious difficulties for each of the change efforts both when they were initiated and throughout their histories. The evidence indicates that the matter was never resolved.

A second difficulty confronting local school officials was their inability to make decisions or carry out plans because of the inordinate delays in obtaining responses from ES/Washington. The local ES administrators reported that they experienced great difficulty in obtaining replies to their requests for approval of project plans, their personnel recommendations, or the expenditure of funds. A third problem concerned community participation. The local educators claimed that the requirements established by ES/Washington were unrealistic, failed to provide sufficient flexibility with respect to permissible forms of participation and disregarded local norms. A fourth issue was the needless constraints to which local officials felt they were exposed in managing their projects. They maintained that the regulations established by ES/Washington made them too subservient to the "feds" and largely precluded their offering leadership to their change efforts.

Not being told what ES/Washington meant by the term, "comprehensive educational change," (even though whatever it meant constituted a primary objective of local ES projects) and not receiving prompt or clear responses to their questions were conditions which especially frustrated and upset local educational officials and which were highly dysfunctional for the management and operation of their projects. The most important implication from these findings is that, before an agency launches a new educational program involving local school districts, its own house must be in order. In addition to specifying the obligations of participating school districts to it, the governmental agency needs to specify its responsibilities to

them and the functions it will have to perform if the local projects are to achieve their change objectives. It then needs to establish effective, efficient and flexible arrangements and procedures so that it can offer maximum service to the field. In short, the findings of the case studies strongly suggest that the "governmental store" should not be opened until it is equipped to meet the needs of its clients and to offer them services of high quality.

A second implication of the findings is that government agencies need to exercise great care and caution in the selection of school districts to participate in programs that are federally stimulated and supported. As Kirst (1977) has implied, the attractiveness of the ES program to the school officials in the five districts was not its stated objectives. What primarily motivated them to enter the ES competition was their interest in obtaining additional funds for their financially strapped school districts. Other factors also motivated the school administrators. In Jackson County, the superintendent of schools viewed the ES project as a means to increase employment opportunities and to enhance his power base in the community (Wacester, 1977). In River District, the "locals" perceived it as a means to unify five scattered school districts that had recently been consolidated (Messerschmidt, 1977). Shiloh County was seeking funds to gain accreditation for its high school (Clinton, 1977). In view of the fiscal and other problems confronting the local school administrators, it made good sense for them to attempt to obtain an "ES project" to achieve purely local objectives. Thus, regardless of the objectives of the external funding agency, local school officials view such projects as potential solutions to important fiscal and political problems that confront them and their school districts.

The case-study findings further imply that federal officials interested in stimulating educational change at the local level need to recognize that school districts selected to participate in their programs of educational change should not be treated uniformly. The districts selected for participation in the ES program varied greatly in their capability for designing and implementing their projects. Arcadia, for example, brought to its activities as an ES project successful experience with an ESEA Tittle III project (Donnelly, 1977). Its superintendent of schools was noted for his skill as a leader. However, in spite of extensive previous outside funding Jackson County had exhibited little success in overcoming its educational problems and lacked strong leadership (Wacaster, 1977).

Astute state and federal officials concerned with facilitating local change efforts need to consider carefully how their programs can be designed to help a Jackson County without imposing unnecessary obstacles in the path of an Arcadia. In the case of a school district with a history of little success in previous change efforts that lacks administrative leadership, government funding of its proposed change effort may need to be withheld until it can demonstrate that it has developed the organizational capabilities needed to implement it. For a school system, however, that has demonstrated its ability to engage in successful change and that has able administrators, external funding agencies should provide it with considerable latitude in carrying out its proposed innovative program.

A third important implication of the case study findings for governmental agencies comes to the surface when we focus on circumstances that had negative effects on the school system change efforts. One was the way the school districts largely wasted their year of planning. A

second was their uncritical acceptance of innovations. A third was their lack of awareness of, or inattentiveness to, implementation obstacles. A fourth was their poor choice of consultants or their inability to maximize their services. A fifth was their inability to conceptualize the educational change process. A sixth was the lack of leadership displayed by officials who managed change efforts. The frequency with which these similar obstacles arose and their negative impact on the change efforts strongly imply that government agencies need to recognize that unless they take the initiative in efforts to eliminate or minimize such obstacles change efforts have little chance of succeeding. For the benefit of school districts lacking systematic planning skills they will need to facilitate the creation of innovative seminars and other forms of short-term training in strategic planning skills and those essential to success in the initiation, implementation and incorporation stages as well. They will also need to aid in establishing programs that focus on leadership problems of educational change efforts.

In short, government agencies need to create opportunities for local educators to obtain the perspectives and conceptual tools needed to tackle their complex leadership tasks in a competent and responsible manner. They need to attempt to prevent the emergence of impediments and to equip "locals" with ways of thinking about the change process that will materially facilitate the resolution of their critical problems.

A fourth implication of the findings is that governmental agencies need to pursue courses of action that will minimize friction and tensions in their relationships with "locals." The case studies revealed that the relations between ES/Washington and local officials in several of the communities badly deteriorated over the course of the change efforts.

This was a function in part of blocked communications. But it also could be attributed, on occasion, to what local officials perceived as abrupt, abrasive, or discourteous behavior of certain ES/Washington officials.

A fifth implication is that government agencies need to be certain that their personnel are equipped to perform their responsibilities in a competent manner. The case studies suggested that some ES/Washington staff members had little understanding of the constraints under which school superintendents work and of the complex nature of their roles and community involvements. Others appeared to have simplistic conceptions of the change process, and still others appeared to ignore the political and social matrix in which all school systems are embedded.

These findings suggest, then, that government agencies also need to develop in-service training programs and related socialization devices for their personnel. As Gideonse (1977) has noted, both partners in programs involving federal-local relationships may require re-tooling if they are to carry out their tasks in a responsible manner.

Finally, three other implications of the findings deserve note. One is that in the proposals or plans that school districts submit to federal or state agencies in support of their educational change applications, a section might be required that focuses on anticipated implementation problems and proposed ways of coping with them. This device would focus attention on the inevitability of implementation problems and on the importance of attempting to identify them early in the change process. It would also provide a basis for assessing the type of educational-change assumptions on which local officials are basing their plans. A second is that in view of the difficulties of school districts in selecting consultants and using them efficiently, the government agency might sponsor

the preparation of a small publication, prepared by experts, that would list competent consultants by their area of specialization who are available to advise on problems that arise in educational change efforts. It could also offer suggestions in line with Lippitt's (1977) proposals about ways to maximize the services of consultants. A third is that just as it is functional to conceive of a change effort at the local level as consisting of a series of stages, each of which has its distinct problems, it also may be highly useful for government agencies to attempt to specify the phases through which a government-local relationship must pass if their collaboration is to be successful. Such an analysis would identify the sequence of stages of a change effort and problems that can be anticipated to arise in each stage.

Further Recommendations For Future Federal Initiatives

Many weaknesses in the relationships between ES/Washington and the ES school districts had dysfunctional consequences for the five educational change efforts. The relationships between the "feds" and "locals" were frequently characterized by misunderstandings, misperceptions, distrust, and lack of confidence. And at times, they appeared to be adversaries, rather than collaborators, in an important educational enterprise. As noted, numerous factors undoubtedly accounted for this unfortunate state of affairs. We submit, however, that many of them could be attributed to the fact that neither party had any real understanding of the constraints to which the other was exposed, the ground rules to which each had to subscribe, and the type of problems that these constraints could be expected to create in their relationships. Furthermore, the case studies reveal that the rights and obligations of a local school district in its relationship with ES/Washington were never spelled out clearly. In addition,

there was considerable ambiguity and confusion over matters such as the extent to which the "feds" could influence local school affairs. These circumstances imply that for any governmentally-stimulated-and-funded educational change effort of major proportions it may be advisable to establish short-term feedback sessions that would include both the "feds" and "locals" in candid discussions of important problems that can be anticipated to occur and that can have an important bearing on the change effort. Interpersonal and inter-organizational difficulties in change efforts can be so debilitating that it would appear that the benefit of short-term feedback sessions or similar mechanisms of this kind would far outweigh their costs.

The case study findings imply the need for a second innovation: a new role whose incumbents would serve as a middleman or broker between school districts and their external funding agencies. A basic assumption underlying this proposal is that officials of school districts are frequently at a loss in negotiating with the "feds," are not aware of their own rights and in general are placed in a subordinate position. A second assumption is that the "feds" have little understanding of the problems of the "locals," are also uncertain of their own rights, and are unclear about the limits of their authority.[5]

Brokers could play an important role by attempting to protect the interest of both parties in their contractual negotiations. They could call meetings of the two groups when serious misunderstandings occurred between them and assist in working out solutions to their problems. They could also serve as fact finders and fact procurers when either of the parties requested their services.

A third innovation suggested by the case studies that might be of considerable use is the development of a manual that would describe major problems in federal-local relations that arise at each stage of the change process, major types of implementation problems, and ways to conceptualize the change process and related matters; it could suggest alternative strategies to deal with basic problems that generally arise in the change efforts. Individuals who manage change efforts at the local level and those who monitor them at the state or federal level usually have little understanding of the complexities of the change process, circumstances that influence it or ways to conceptualize it. A document of this kind, would focus on perspectives, understandings, ways of conceptualizing the change process, and strategies for dealing with implementation problems, not on "cookbook" rules.

## FOOTNOTES

1. In terms of actual expenditures the final figure is likely to be closer to $55 million.

2. See Doyle et al. (1976), Institute for Scientific Analysis (1976), and Reynolds et al. (1976) for the final research reports of the three urban projects selected during the first competition. Final research reports for the other projects have yet to be issued by their respective research contractors.

3. These quotations have been taken from personal notes made by the author during visits to six of the school districts in August 1972 with the ES/Washington project officer for those sites.

4. This observation has also been made by Corwin (1977) based on his interviews with ES/Washington officials.

5. See Corwin (1977) for a series of first-person accounts of such ambiguity on the part of ES/Washington project officers.

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